

Academic event report

15th International Pragmatics Conference (IPra2017), 16-21 July 2017, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Each International Pragmatics Conference is a huge event, and so was this one – a six-day event with over a thousand speakers and 17-18 parallel sessions running for most of the conference days. My own small discovery as an attendee was that among the wealth of various strains of research, across the board from the most established to the most experimental, humour and laughter-related sessions were strongly present and could now be considered mainstream. During the Belfast conference five major organised panels on humour and laughter were held with the total of 39 papers and about 50 speakers – a decent-size humour conference in itself. In addition at least three other panels peripherally dealt with humour and laughter: *Producing ‘Foreigners’ in TV Entertainment Shows: Sequence, Categorization, and Multisemiotic Practices* (organised by: Gabriele Kasper of the University of Hawaii), *The Pragmatics-Conversation Analysis Interface* (organised by: Rebecca Clift of the University of Essex, Elizabeth Holt of the University of Huddersfield), and *The Pragmatics of “Bonding” in Cross-Cultural Encounters: East Asian Perspectives* (organised by: Risako Ide of University of Tsukuba and Kaori Hata of Rikkyo University), not to mention a number of individual speakers. Perhaps not unexpectedly at a pragmatic conference, the humour panels focused on identity-related issues and on targets and contexts when humour is used, particularly on conversation, on politeness and impoliteness in real-life and virtual interactions, while one of them centred on language play as a way to trick or deceive.

Thus Jan Chovanec of Masaryk University at Brno and Villy Tsakona of Democritus University of Thrace at Alexandroupoli – member of the Editorial Team of the European Journal of Humour Research, organised a panel entitled *Laughing at the ‘Other’: Critical Pragmatic Insights into the Humorous Construction of Opposing Groups*. This panel focused on humour explicitly involving the ‘other’ in the hope to demonstrate the broader significance of the issue, broader social practices, especially underlying ideologies, stereotypes, and social beliefs (cf. Duszak 2002; Archakis & Tsakona 2005). To this end, the panel drew upon insights from critical discourse studies in order to explore the contrast between ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ and the forms and aims of the relevant humorous acts, as well as the role of humour as mediating between the personal/public texts (‘the micro-level’) and discursive practices (‘the meso-level’) and the broader social practices involving dominant values (the ‘macro-level’; Fairclough 1992). The 9 presentations in the panel dealt with conversation, social campaigns, discussions on internet forums, political shows, and the language material concerned Greek, Estonian, Polish, Czech, Spanish, and Chinese.

Anastasia Stamou & Theodora P. Saltidou, The construction of ‘cool children’ and ‘super seniors’ in Greek family comedy sitcoms: Laughing at the youthful ‘other’

Béatrice Priego-Valverde, “People are weird”: Sharing a laugh at others in conversations between friends

Marianthi Georgalidou, Vasilisa Kazoulli & Hasan Kaili, Humour in conversations with and among bilinguals: constructing ‘otherness’

Villy Tsakona, Argiris Archakis & Sofia Lampropoulou, Humorous majority voices- and serious immigrant ones in an anti-racist campaign

Liisi Laineste, The enemy within us: Self-directed laughter in the 2015 refugee crisis

Jan Chovanec, Humorous comments and self/other positioning in online news forums

Noam Gal, Ironic Humour in the context-collapsed web as a social segregation tool

Na Yang & Yongping Ran, "No non-serious heckling": Mock impoliteness as an argumentative account for the intended tease in television crosstalk discourse

Władysław Chłopicki, Strategies of humorous otherising the political opponent. The case of recent Polish political struggle

The panel entitled *From Self to Culture: Identity Construction in Humour-related Discourses*, organised by Valeria Sinkeviciute of the University of Queensland in Australia, aimed at exploring how social, cultural, ethnic, gender, or professional identity is constructed in different humour-related discourses, e.g. in conversations, story-telling, interviews, virtual interaction, and to observe to what extent the concept of self (whether individual, collective or culture-related) and the other are portrayed and negotiated by the interlocutors. It drew 8 pragmatically-oriented papers that analysed the question of identity from different methodological perspectives in various humour-related interactional practices as well as qualitative interviews, the language data coming from US, UK, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Australia, or Portugal.

Pia Pichler, ‘He’s got Jerry curls and Tims on’: Humour and indexicality in young men’s talk about hair and fashion style

Meredith Marra, They won't really shoot you, I promise!: Humour and negotiation of professional identity by workplace newcomers

Sara Orthaber, ‘My sincere thanks for your warm and most kind advice – not’: Construction of virtual identity through entertaining impoliteness

Solvejg Wolfers, Kieran File & Stephanie Schnurr, “Just because he’s black”. Identity construction and racial humour in a German U-19 football team

Sylvia Sierra, “That’s me doing a Native American thing”: Cultural stereotypes, humour, and identity construction in everyday conversations among friends

Concha Maria Höfler, Laughter, hyperbole and “funny stories” - using humour in positioning Georgia’s Greek community

Valeria Sinkeviciute, Juggling individual and collective identities: A case of Australian and British views on jocularity

Milana Morozova, Identity construction in Portuguese stand-up comedy: towards perspective of socio-discursive interactionism (SDI)

The panel entitled *Exploring Identities through Humour* was organised by Larissa Timofeeva-Timofeev and Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo of University of Alicante. It drew 5 papers which aimed at providing an interdisciplinary framework for a fruitful reflection on how linguistic humour is used as an identity-building tool and as a psychosocial strategy. Humour, seen as a perfect combination of subversion and fun, becomes a powerful means towards cultural and personal affirmation, since its format allows speakers to voice opinions and ideas which would probably be inappropriate within a serious mode of communication. It explored the development

of so-called humour competence in children and looked at how adult speakers use humour in order to shape their sexual, political, religious, cultural, professional identities as well as investigated a range of linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and neurological disorders as long as they have an impact on humorous communication.

Larissa Timofeeva-Timofeev, Humour, butterflies, and other bugs: 12-year-olds expressing their identities in written humorous stories

Lovorka Zergollern-Miletic, Humour in the world of students/Students in the world of humour

Leonor Ruiz-Gurillo, Feminine identity in Eva Hache's humorous monologues

Francisco Yus Ramos, Humour and user's identity. The case of memes on the Internet

Manuel Padilla Cruz, The construction and/or reinforcement of a local identity through humour: The case of Cádiz Carnival

A panel on *Trickery, Cheating, and Deceit in Language Play*, organised by Nancy Bell of Washington State University and Michael Haugh of the University of Queensland, drew 6 papers which focused on exploring the ways in which trickery, cheating, and various other forms of deception and pretence arise and function in and around playful discourse. The presenters examined the forms and functions of such practices and asked a number of pertinent questions: How are jocular forms of cheating and trickery constructed in interaction? What interpersonal and instrumental goals might they achieve? How do interlocutors respond to such practices? The speakers also recognised that what counts as play or deception may vary cross-culturally or situationally, thus the varying sociocultural norms around playful deceptive practices were examined, too. Furthermore, although they focused on playful deception, they also considered the functions of ostensibly non-serious forms of deceptive pretence as it is well-recognised that non-serious language also works to achieve serious, instrumental goals.

Nancy Bell, Michael Haugh & Roslyn Rowen, Jocular deception and pretence in interaction

Kathy Howard, Teasing as Language Socialization in a Culturally Diverse Kindergarten

Steve Oswald & Didier Maillat, The incongruous, the deceptive and the humorous: types of incongruity and the revelation of deception

Gerardine Pereira & Neal Norrick, Breaking rules, violating norms and identity in language play

Anne Pomerantz, Negotiating shifts between serious and playful language in tutoring sessions

Letícia Stallone & Michael Haugh, A comparative investigation of joint fantasising amongst speakers of Brazilian Portuguese and speakers of (American and Australian) English

Finally, Tom Van Hout of University of Antwerp, Peter Burger of University of Leiden and Otto Santa Ana of University of California in Los Angeles organised a substantial panel entitled *Political Humour as Social Action: Verbal-visual Attitudes towards Politicians in Late Modernity*. This panel of 10 papers invited researchers to address the relationship between political humour and media(ted) language. It examined the distinctive nature of the pragmatics of humour as this involved news events such as sound bites (Lee 2012), bloopers (Silverstein 2011), or talk scandals (Ekström & Johansson 2008), media genres such as cartoons, fake news (Waisanen 2011), late-night comedic monologues (Santa Ana 2009) or internet memes (Milner 2013) types of humour such as irony (Sanina 2014), and political satire (Reilly 2012). This panel contained empirically grounded contributions from a variety of countries, including US, Singapore, China, Tibet, Russia and Argentina, that showed what social action was accomplished when political discourse and media discourse were juxtaposed, thus contributions to investigating political humour came from a variety of analytical approaches such as discourse analysis, rhetoric, multimodality, and

linguistic ethnography. The panel ended with an interesting paper by Otto Santa Ana, who made a case for the conceptual nature of humour.

Argyro Kantara, Laughter as rhetorical device in political interviews

Di Yu, 'That's the Boogie Man of Washington': Jabbing in Late Night Talk Show Interviews

Tom Van Hout & Peter Burger, Quote unquote. The metapragmatics of text bite journalism

Allaina Kilby, Emotions in humour - A study of emotive satirical news reporting

Timothy Thurston, Gesar's Horse Herder: The metapragmatic work of twenty-first century Tibetan comedy in China

Velda Khoo, The role of Singlish humour in the rise of the opposition politician in Singapore

Lutgard Lams, Humour as a discursive vehicle for political and social critique in Chinese society

Anna Sanina, Ready... steady... smile: Computer-mediated political irony in Russia

Muireann Prendergast, Political cartoons as carnivalesque: A multimodal discourse analysis of Argentina's Humour Registrado magazine

Otto Santa Ana, Humour is not language-based

Thus, in view of the above report and the rewarding nature of the conference, it seems desirable to plan the collective participation of the humour scholars community in the 16th International Pragmatics Conference, which has been announced for 9-14 June 2019 and is to be held at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University under the general theme: *Pragmatics of the Margins*. This is particularly appropriate since the upcoming conference aims at "placing all pragmatics in the margins" and answering the question of what can be gained from "dirty pragmatics" which takes place "in the 'dirty' margins, linked not by universalizing theories but via messy entanglements; epistemologically interdependent and mutually constitutive" (cf. https://ipra.uantwerpen.be/main.aspx?c=*CONFERENCE2006&n=1534&ct=1534&e=16192) – an ideal topic for humour scholars.

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